Chapter 25
COME HERE FOR A MOMENT, WON'T YOU?
XIAO-MAO.
THERE'S SOMETHING I'D LIKE YOU TO TAKE A LOOK AT.
...A RECORD OF A PAST INCIDENT?
THIS IS...
AGHAST...
THAT TINGLY, NUMBING SENSATION BLOWFISH GIVES YOU FEELS SOOOO GOOD.
DAYDREAMING
ぽ
お
お
お…
OOH, I'D LOVE TO EAT MORE...
I'VE EATEN A LITTLE BIT OF THE LESS POISONOUS PARTS, TAKING CARE NOT TO DIE.
MORE THAN TEN YEARS AGO, A MERCHANT CONTRACTED FOOD POISONING.
HE HAD APPARENTLY EATEN RAW BLOWFISH IN A DISH.
MMM; LUCKY HIM...
91

FOCUS
WITH A REWARD LIKE THAT, MAYBE I SHOULD GET SERIOUS ABOUT THIS.
SO WHY AM I LOOKING AT THIS?
WHEN I GET THE CHANCE, I'LL TAKE YOU TO A SIMILAR RESTAU-RANT.
NO BLOW-FISH LIVER, THOUGH.
I DEALT WITH THIS INCIDENT FOR WORK BACK THEN.
AND APPROXI-MATELY ONE WEEK AGO, A VERY SIMILAR INCIDENT OCCURRED.
A FORMER COLLEAGUE OF MINE CONSULTED WITH ME ABOUT IT.
HE TOLD ME OF A MINISTER WHO HAD EATEN A DISH OF RAW BLOWFISH AND FALLEN COMATOSE.

Chapter 25 A Dish of Raw Fish

...NOW THAT I'VE BROUGHT UP POI-SON...
AND ...
...DO YOU REALLY WANT ME TO STOP TALKING?
YOU'RE GOOD AT KEEPING SECRETS, SO I DON'T SEE THE PROBLEM.
IS THIS SOME-THING YOU SHOULD REALLY BE DISCUSSING WITH ME?
A MINISTER? IN A COMA?
IN OTHER WORDS, DON'T TELL ANYONE ELSE.
UM, GAO SHUN...
THAT'S LOW.
UR
GH...
.....
IF WE'RE TALKING POISON THAT INDUCED A COMA...
...I'D NORMALLY ASSUME THAT THE VICTIM HAD EATEN BLOWFISH LIVER.
...BUT RATHER THE PARBOILED SKIN AND FLESH, IN WHICH THE POISON IS CONSIDER-ABLY LOWER.
...THEY WOULDN'T HAVE USED THE FISH'S ORGANS, IN WHICH THE POISON CONTENT IS HIGH...
HOWEVER, IN A DISH OF RAW FISH LIKE THE ONE IN THE RECORD OF THE INCIDENT...

UM, GAO SHUN?
COULD THERE REALLY HAVE BEEN THAT MUCH TOXIN BUILT UP IN IT?
DEPENDING ON THE SPECIES AND ITS ENVIRON-MENT...
...I SUPPOSE ITS BODY COULD'VE BEEN POI-SONOUS.
I'M SURE MOST PEOPLE ARE AWARE THAT BLOWFISH IS POISONOUS.
THERE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE ANYTHING UNTOWARD ABOUT THIS TO ME.
WELL ...
...IN BOTH CASES...
...THE COOKS INSISTED THAT THEY DIDN'T USE BLOWFISH.
AND...
...THAT'S NOT THE ONLY COMMON-ALITY.

BY VIRTUE OF ALL THE ORGANS BEING INTACT...
...IT WAS DETERMINED THAT NO BLOWFISH LIVER WAS EATEN.
...AND WERE PRESENTED AS EVIDENCE.
BLOWFISH SKIN AND ORGANS WERE FOUND IN THE KITCHEN WASTE...
BOTH THE GOVERNMENT MINISTER AND THE MERCHANT AFFLICTED ...
...WERE GOURMETS AND WERE IN THE HABIT OF EATING DELICACIES.
AND IN BOTH CASES, THE COOKS ...
THE BLOWFISH WAS FROM YESTERDAY'S DISHES.
I DIDN'T USE IT IN ANYTHING SERVED ON THE DAY THE MAN TOOK ILL.
...VIGOROUSLY PROTESTED THEIR INNOCENCE.
THEY REGULARLY CONSUMED RAW FISH, WHICH HAS BEEN BANNED IN SOME REGIONS...
...AND BLOWFISH WAS A FAVORITE OF THEIRS.
UNFORTUNATELY, THOUGH, THERE WAS NO ONE WHO COULD TESTIFY IN SUPPORT OF THEIR CLAIMS.
THE ARGUMENT MAKES SENSE TO ME RIGHT NOW.
...SO IT'S NOT ODD FOR KITCHEN REFUSE TO BE LEFT FOR SEVERAL DAYS.
GIVEN THE SEASON, TEMPERATURES DROP TO FREEZING DAILY...

HE WAS FOUND SPASMING, HIS LIPS BLUE.
...COLLAPSED A FULL 30 MINUTES AFTER FINISHING HIS MEAL.
THE MAN WHO EXHIBITED SYMPTOMS OF POISONING...
GAO SHUN, I'D LIKE A LITTLE MORE INFORMATION ABOUT THIS CASE.
VERY WELL. I WILL GET YOU WHAT YOU NEED BY TOMORROW.
THE SYMPTOMS SOUND LIKE BLOWFISH POISONING, ALL RIGHT...
...BUT THIS ONE PART GIVES ME PAUSE...
THANK YOU.
THIS IS THE RECIPE BOOK THE COOK USES.
ACCORDING TO EMPLOYEE TESTIMONY...
...JUST ABOUT EVERYTHING THE MINISTER CONSUMED IS RECORDED IN HERE.
97

"ADD THINLY SLICED VEGETABLES TO THE PARBOILED FISH AND DRESS WITH VINEGAR."
THIS MUST BE HOW TO MAKE THE DISH.
THERE ARE A NUMBER OF VINEGAR DRESSINGS LISTED HERE TO COMPLEMENT THE SEASONS AND VARIOUS INGREDIENTS...
...BUT IT DOESN'T DETAIL WHICH FISH AND VEGETA-BLES WERE TO BE USED.
THIS DOESN'T TELL ME WHAT MAIN INGREDIENTS WERE IN THE DISH.
SO YOU'RE STUMPED, HUH?!
IT SEEMS YOU WERE HANGING ON GAO SHUN'S EVERY WORD.
THAT FACE WOUNDS ME.

YOU SAID THE LATEST INCIDENT TOOK PLACE A WEEK AGO, CORRECT?
W-WAIT...
DOES THAT MEAN YOU DON'T PAY ATTENTION TO M—
HOLD STILL, NOW.
THAT'S RIGHT.
PEOPLE TEND TO PAY CLOSE ATTENTION WHEN SOMEONE HAS SOMETHING INTERESTING TO SAY.
WIPE
WIPE
I'M GUESSING THEY MUST HAVE USED DAIKON OR CARROTS...
HMM...
THERE ARE ONLY SO MANY VEGETABLES AVAILABLE IN WINTER.
I HEARD IT WAS SEAWEED, ACTUALLY.

FOR A GOURMAND, COMMON SEAWEED WOULD NEVER DO. I BET THIS DISH HAD SOMETHING UNIQUE IN IT!
GRIN
ニヤ
GRIN
ニヤ
DID YOU SAY SEA-WEED ?!
I DID.
ニヤッ
GRIN
GAO SHUN.
WOULD IT BE POSSIBLE FOR ME TO TAKE A LOOK AT THE KITCHEN?

I'M GLAD WE WERE ABLE TO GET PERMIS-SION SO QUICKLY...
...WE WERE GRANTED ENTRY TO THE KITCHEN WITH EASE.
SINCE THE INVES-TIGATION INTO THE MINISTER'S CASE WAS ALL BUT CLOSED...
じぃ〜
GLARE
HE REMINDS ME OF SOMEONE FOR SOME REASON, THOUGH.
...BUT GAO SHUN MADE ME BRING ALONG AN OFFICIAL I'VE NEVER EVEN SEEN BEFORE.
HE DOESN'T SEEM TO LIKE ME VERY MUCH...
OH WELL.
101

OUR MISTRESS IS ASLEEP FROM EXHAUS-TION...
BOW
...SO I SHALL BE THE ONE SHOWING YOU AROUND TODAY.
MUST BE A MAN-SER-VANT.
THIS IS THE KITCHEN.
IT HASN'T BEEN USED SINCE THE POISONING INCIDENT.
OOH...
VERY CLEAN AND NEAT.
WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING IN HERE?
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP
STOMP

GLARE
キロッ
HOW DARE YOU BARGE INTO OUR HOME WITHOUT PERMIS-SION!
GET OUT AT ONCE!
ビクッ
FLINCH
GRAB
ガシ!!
EEK!
!!
WERE YOU THE ONE WHO BROUGHT THEM IN HERE?!

AND WE ARE HERE ON COURT BUSINESS.
WE HAVE PERMISSION FROM THE LADY OF THE HOUSE.
TCH!
DO AS YOU WISH!
...IS OUR BEING HERE A PROBLEM FOR YOU?
OR...
NOW, WILL YOU ALLOW US TO DO WHAT WE CAME HERE TO DO?
IS THAT TRUE?

THE MASTER'S YOUNGER BROTHER.
EVER SINCE THE MASTER FELL INTO HIS COMA...
...HIS BROTHER HAS BEEN RUNNING THE ESTATE...
WHO'S HE?
SO THAT'S HOW IT IS.
I'M GUESSING ALL THE UTENSILS HAVE BEEN WASHED BY THE COOK.
AND OF COURSE THERE'S NOTHING UNCOOKED JUST LYING AROUND.

LET'S SEE... WHAT ELSE ...?
DO YOU KNOW WHAT'S IN HERE?
OH, YES!
THAT'S A FAVORITE OF THE MASTER'S.
HE ATE IT ALL THE TIME.
106

THAT'S WHY...
...I DON'T THINK THERE'S ANY POISON IN IT.
HE DOESN'T SEEM TO BE LYING.
YOU HEARD THE MAN!
NOW GET OUT!
VERY WELL.
PARDON OUR INTRU-SION.
TAK
SHPY

WHY DID YOU AGREE TO LEAVE SO EASILY?
I'D SAY IT WAS A TACTICAL RETREAT.
DID YOU TAKE THAT FROM THE HOUSE ...?
IT'S ODD.
IT'S STILL TOO EARLY IN THE YEAR TO HARVEST THIS KIND OF SEA-WEED.
AT THE SAME TIME...
...SEAWEED OF THIS TYPE FROM THE PREVIOUS HARVEST WOULD NEVER KEEP THIS LONG IN SALT.
I DON'T THINK THIS IS FROM AROUND HERE.
FOR EXAM-PLE...
...IT MIGHT HAVE COME FROM THE SOUTH VIA TRADE CHANNELS.

!
IT MIGHT BE GOOD TO LOOK INTO WHERE THIS WAS PURCHASED.
I THINK HE GETS MY MEANING.
NOW...
...I JUST HAVE TO SEE TO MY SIDE OF THINGS.
I UNDERSTAND WHY THE OFFICER FROM YESTERDAY AND A SUBORDINATE OF THE MAN WHO CONSULTED GAO SHUN ARE HERE...

WHAT'S THIS?
THE SEAWEED FROM THAT MINISTER'S ESTATE.
...I HAD TO BORROW HIS OFFICE'S KITCHEN.
THOUGH THINGS BEING WHAT THEY ARE...
...BUT WHY JINSHI?!
I DIVIDED IT INTO TWO AND RINSED IT WITH WATER AHEAD OF TIME.
I LOOKED INTO THAT, AND THE SEAWEED WAS INDEED BROUGHT UP FROM THE SOUTH.
WHEN I QUESTIONED THE MANSERVANT...
...HE SAID THE MASTER HAD NEVER EATEN IT IN PRIOR WINTERS.
THE OTHER SERVANTS ON THE ESTATE...
...SAID THE SAME THING WHEN I ASKED.

I ASKED THE COOK ABOUT THE SEAWEED AS WELL.
HE SAID THAT IT'S THE SAME TYPE HE USES REGULARLY AND IT SHOULD NOT BE...
...POI-SON-OUS.
IN-DEED.
IT PROBABLY IS THE SAME.
HOW-EVER...
...JUST BECAUSE IT'S THE SAME KIND OF SEA-WEED...
...IT DOESN'T MEAN THAT IT'S NOT POISONOUS.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT?
...THIS VARIETY OF SEAWEED ISN'T FREQUENTLY EATEN IN THE SOUTH?
WHAT IF...
...HAD THE LOCALS HARVEST AND SALT THE SEAWEED FOR THE PURPOSE OF MAKING MONEY?
PERHAPS A TRADER, UPON HEARING IT WAS A FAVORITE FOOD ITEM OF A GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL AND GOURMET...
FOR EXAMPLE, EELS ARE ACTUALLY POISON-OUS...
...BUT IF YOU DRAIN THEM OF THEIR BLOOD AND COOK THEM, THEY BECOME EDIBLE.
I BELIEVE THIS SEAWEED NEEDS TO BE SOAKED IN LIMEWATER.
SOME POISONOUS THINGS IN THE WORLD CAN BE MADE INNOCUOUS.

...IS THE SEAWEED SOAKED IN LIMEWATER AND THE SEAWEED THAT WAS NOT.
...WHAT I HAVE HERE BEFORE YOU ALL...
AND ...
GRIN
CHOMP

PROB-ABLY.
THIS WAS THE KIND SOAKED IN LIMEWATER, SO IT'S OKAY.
もぐ MUNCH
もぐ MUNCH
"PROB-ABLY" ?!
HAVE YOU LOST YOUR MIND ?!
DON'T SAY THAT WITH SUCH CONFI-DENCE!
TA-DA
ごくん GULP
I PRE-PARED AN EMETIC, IN CASE I NEED TO COUGH IT UP!
DON'T WORRY.
NOW PUKE!
YES, SIR.
GAO SHUN!
GRAB ガシ
HEY!
SWIPE バッ
GIVE ME THAT!
AH!

HFF!
HFF!
HFF!
I'D ACTUALLY ONLY HEARD ABOUT IT BEFORE.
I NEEDED TO TEST IT OUT AND MAKE SURE IT HAD DETOXIFIED AFTER A NIGHT'S SOAK.
I WAS EATING IT TO PROVE IT WASN'T TOXIC...
I CAN'T BELIEVE THEM...
GRABBING A YOUNG, UNMARRIED GIRL LIKE ME AND MAKING ME BARF MY GUTS OUT...
UH, NOW THAT I'VE COLLECTED MYSELF ...
THE QUESTION IS...
WHO SUGGESTED IMPORTING THIS SALT-CURED SEAWEED...
...TO THE TRADER ...?

CLEARLY, IT WOULD BE VERY RISKY TO IMPORT THAT SEA-WEED...
...FROM A REGION THAT DOESN'T ACTUALLY CONSUME IT.
IF THE ONE TO DO SO WAS THE MAN WHO ATE IT HIMSELF ...
...THEN, IN A WAY, HE HAD IT COMING.
BUT IF IT WASN'T HIM...
THE MEN HERE ARE ALL INTELLI-GENT.
I'M SURE THERE'S NO NEED FOR ME TO ELAB-ORATE.
I UNDER-STAND.
IF...
...THE PERSON WHO IMPORTED THE SEA-WEED DID SO KNOWING JUST HOW POISONOUS IT IS...
116

I CAN'T SAY FOR CERTAIN ...
...BUT IT'S POSSIBLE THAT IT MIGHT ALSO PROVE A CLUE TO THE CASE FROM TEN YEARS AGO.
BUT I GUESS ...
...THIS CASE IS SETTLED FOR THE TIME BEING.
I WOUND UP LETTING MY CURIOSITY GET THE BETTER OF ME AND DOING THINGS OUTSIDE MY PURVIEW AGAIN.
I BET PA'D BE STEAMED IF HE FOUND OUT.
REACH
HEY!

THE NEXT DAY...
...THERE WAS A NEW DEVEL-OPMENT IN THE CASE.
THE MINISTER'S YOUNGER BROTHER TURNED OUT TO BE THE CULPRIT.
HE CON-FESSED ONCE THE SEAWEED'S POINT OF PURCHASE HAD BEEN CONFIRMED.
THE REASON FOR HIS BEHAVIOR IN THE KITCHEN ...
...WAS MOST LIKELY BECAUSE HE DIDN'T WANT US TO DISCOVER THE SEA-WEED.
HIS MOTIVE, AS THE SECOND SON...
...WAS THAT HE WANTED TO GET HIS OLDER BROTHER OUT OF THE WAY.
PRETTY RUN-OF-THE-MILL. WHAT A LET-DOWN.
I WONDER HOW A MAN WITH SUCH A PETTY REASON FOR MURDER...
...LEARNED OF THE SEAWEED'S TOXIC NATURE
I ASKED HIM AS MUCH. HE'D ALLEGEDLY HEARD ABOUT IT FROM SOMEONE SITTING BESIDE HIM AT A DRINKING ESTABLISHMENT.

I DON'T KNOW IF IT WAS A COINCI-DENCE OR NOT.
IN THE END, I DIDN'T GET TO EAT THE POISONOUS SEAWEED.
BUT I GUESS THAT'S ALL OVER WITH NOW.
I SHOULD USE MY HEAD FOR MORE IMPORTANT THINGS...
WOULD THAT DRY-LEAF-COLORED FUNGI MAKE A GOOD MEDICINAL TIPPLE?
TWIRL
TWIRL
OR PERHAPS I SHOULD GO WITH SOME KIND OF TABLET?
SUCH AS...
...WHAT TO USE YOU-KNOW-WHAT FOR...!
HEH HEH HEH HEH...
BUMP
HEH?

WELCOME HOME!
OH.
...SIR JIN-SHI.
I ACCI-DENTALLY SMILED AT HIM...
BAM
BAM
?!

I SWEAR THIS ISN'T MY FAULT.
BAM
BAM
WHAP
WHAT'S GOING ON IN HERE?
IT SEEMS JINSHI'S LATE RETURNS HOME...
...ARE BECAUSE HE'S BEEN FINISHING UP A LOT OF AMASSED WORK.
I HOPE YOU'RE FEELING BETTER.
SIGH
I GUESS IT COULD BE THAT WE JUST GENERALLY DON'T SEE EYE-TO-EYE...
I BET HE SKIPPED OUT ON WORK TO SATE HIS CURIOS-ITY!
...BUT IT SEEMS WE HAVE DIFFERING OPINIONS.

SO THERE ARE PEOPLE EVEN YOU CAN'T GET ALONG WITH.
I'M HUMAN TOO, YOU KNOW.
WE HERE CAN RESIST HIM...
...BUT THIS HEAVENLY EUNUCH WHO MAKES WOMEN SWOON AT THE SIGHT OF HIM...
...SEEMS TO HAVE SOMEONE IN HIS LIFE WHO CAN BRING HIM BACK DOWN TO EARTH.
HE'S A TOP MILITARY MAN WHO COULD CHOP OFF MY HEAD.
FLINCH
HE COMES FROM GOOD STOCK BUT REMAINS UNMARRIED DESPITE ALREADY BEING IN HIS FORTIES.
HE ADOPTED HIS NEPHEW AND LEAVES THE RUNNING OF THE FAMILY ESTATE TO HIM.
HIS ONLY INTERESTS ARE GO, SHOGI, AND RUMORS.
HE'S A FAMOUS ECCENTRIC.
A HIGH-RANKING MILITARY OFFICER...
...WHO'S AN ECCENTRIC?
UGH. THAT SOUNDS FAMILIAR...
122

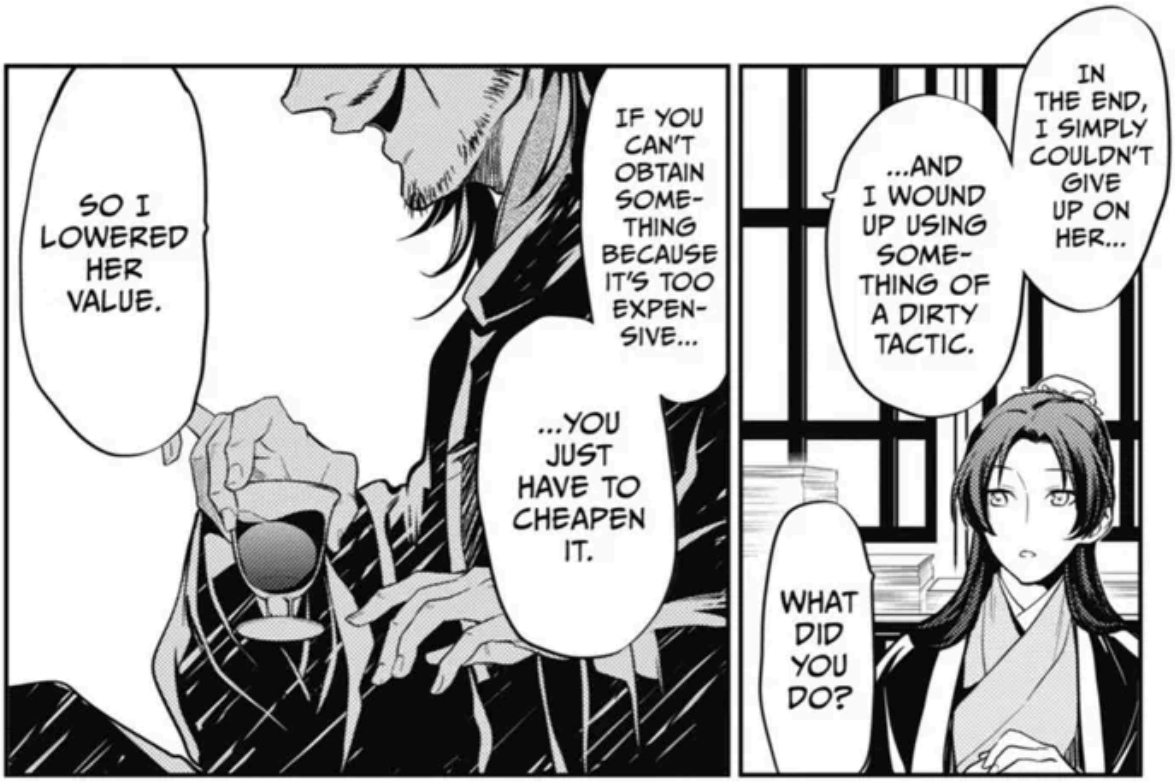
...I SHOULD JUST FORGET ABOUT THIS!
NO GOOD CAN COME OF SHARING IN HIS WORRIES!
OKAY...
GRUMBLE
EVERY TIME HE FINDS A TARGET...
...HE PUTS OFF APPROVING THINGS...
GRUMBLE
GRUMBLE
LATELY, HE'S ALWAYS IN MY OFFICE, AND HE NEVER LEAVES.
AND IT SEEMS HE'S GOT HIS EYE ON ME THIS TIME.
BUT JUST AS I CAST IT ALL FAR FROM MY MIND...
...THAT BAD FEELING I'D GOTTEN PROVED TO BE SPOT-ON, AS USUAL.
.....
ER, I BELIEVE THIS PROPOSAL HAS ALREADY PASSED...

THIS MAN...
...IS KNOWN AS LAKAN.
IT'S NOT EASY TO FIND FLOWERS TO ADMIRE IN THE WINTER.
SO I THOUGHT I MIGHT BE ABLE TO DO SO HERE.
HE'S A TACTI-CIAN.
IN A DIFFERENT TIME, HE WOULD HAVE BEEN THE SORT OF MAN WHO WAS INSTRUMENTAL IN OVER-THROWING EMPERORS.
THE REASON HE KEEPS COMING HERE LATELY...
...SEEMS TO HAVE SOMETHING TO DO WITH MY NEW MAID, WHO HAS CONNECTIONS TO VERDIGRIS.

THOUGH...
...I CAN'T SAY IT'S COMPLETELY UNTRUE.
...EVERYONE IN THE MILITARY THINKS I BOUGHT OUT THE CONTRACT OF A COURTESAN.
THANKS TO HIS RUMOR-MONGER-ING...
WHAT KIND OF COURTE-SAN WAS SHE?
I TOOK HIM TO HAVE ZERO INTEREST IN RELATION-SHIPS.
THAT'S SUR-PRIS-ING.
THAT REMINDS ME... I ONCE HAD A FRIEND AT VERDIGRIS.
DAMN!
I ASKED THAT WITHOUT THINKING.
LEER
I DOUBT I'LL EVER MEET ANOTHER AS INTERESTING AS HER.
THIS ALL HAPPENED BACK WHEN I WAS QUITE YOUNG. WHAT A WOMAN SHE WAS.

SHE WAS SKILLED ENOUGH ...
...TO BEAT A TACTICIAN SUCH AS YOURSELF?
I EVEN CONSID-ERED BUYING OUT HER CON-TRACT...
...BUT NOTHING EVER GOES TO PLAN IN THIS WORLD.
GLUG GLUG
SHE WAS GOOD AT GO AND SHOGI.
SHE WON AT SHOGI BUT WOULD ALWAYS LOSE TO ME AT GO.
TWO MEN OF MEANS WITH ECCENTRIC TASTES...
WE DROVE UP THE PRICE LIKE IT WAS A COMPE-TITION.
THE CONTRACTS OF SOME COURTE-SANS CAN COST AS MUCH AS AN IMPERIAL VILLA.
THE PRICE OF HERS MUST'VE BEEN GREAT INDEED...
...IF EVEN LAKAN COULDN'T WIN.
126

SHE WAS A VERY UNUSUAL COURTE-SAN.
SHE SOLD HER ARTS, NOT HER BODY.
AND WHEN SHE WOULD POUR TEA FOR HER PATRONS...
...SHE WOULD GAZE UPON YOU WITH SUCH HAUGHTINESS, AS IF SHE WAS PERFORMING AN ACT OF CHARITY FOR SOME LOWBORN COMMONER.
DESPITE THAT OR PERHAPS BECAUSE OF IT, THERE WERE QUITE A FEW PEOPLE WHO WERE COMPLETELY INFATUATED WITH HER.
MYSELF AMONG THEM, OF COURSE.
I JUST COULDN'T GET ENOUGH OF THE SHUDDER THOSE LOOKS WOULD SEND DOWN MY SPINE...
URGH.
...AND I THOUGHT THAT I'D LIKE TO SOME-DAY...
...HAVE MY WAY WITH HER.


SO I LOWERED HER VALUE.
IF YOU CAN'T OBTAIN SOME-THING BECAUSE IT'S TOO EXPEN-SIVE...
...YOU JUST HAVE TO CHEAPEN IT.
IN THE END, I SIMPLY COULDN'T GIVE UP ON HER...
...AND I WOUND UP USING SOME-THING OF A DIRTY TACTIC.
WHAT DID YOU DO?

GRIN ニヤァ
WOULD YOU LIKE TO KNOW HOW I DID IT?

THERE'S ONE THING I'D LIKE TO REQUEST OF YOU BEFORE I CONTINUE.
IS THIS REALLY THE TIME TO BE PUTTING ON AIRS WHEN YOU'RE THIS FAR INTO YOUR TALE?
TOLT ピク

YOU SEE, A FRIEND OF MINE PASSED JUST THE OTHER DAY.
HE LEFT BEHIND A WILL THAT GIVES THE IMPRESSION THAT THERE'S MORE TO IT THAN AT FIRST GLANCE.
I CAN'T STOP WONDERING ABOUT IT.
WHAT EXACTLY WOULD YOU HAVE ME DO?
WELL, THAT MAID YOU RECENTLY HIRED...
I HEAR SHE'S CURIOUSLY GOOD AT SOLVING MYSTERIES.
SHE SOUNDS LIKE A MOST INTEREST-ING GIRL.
WHAT OF IT?

OH, IT'S NOT A PARTIC-ULARLY DIFFICULT REQUEST.
I'D JUST LIKE THIS INTELLIGENT MAID OF YOURS TO LOOK INTO THIS WILL FOR ME.
WELL ...
...I SUPPOSE THERE'D BE NO HARM IN ASKING...
SIGH
?
SHUDDER
SHUDDER
130